

RECORD OF DECISION

Powder River Resource Management Plan
Powder River Resource Area
Miles City District, BLM
Powder River and Treasure Counties and portions of
Rosebud, Carter, Big Horn and Custer Counties, Montana

I. INTRODUCTION

This Record of Decision documents approval of the Powder River Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement. The plan provides the Powder River Resource area with long-range general management direction and establishes management requirements for the use of natural resources. It identifies management goals for public land and federal minerals, the location of the lands and minerals addressed in the six counties comprising the resource area, and mitigation measures to avoid or minimize environment harm. It provides for coordinated use of minerals, range, wildlife habitat, watershed and land transactions to provide a sustained yield of goods and services for the benefit of the American public. Wilderness study areas and cultural, recreation, forest, visual, soil, water, and air resources are managed to protect them from significant or permanent impairment as well as enhance their resource value.

The RMP/EIS establishes broad direction and does not attempt to anticipate and resolve every specific problem or conflict which may arise in management of the Powder River Resource Area.

The RMP/EIS was prepared to describe the proposed plan and alternatives to it. It describes the environment to be affected and discloses the potential environmental consequences of implementing the proposed plan and the alternatives to that action. Preparing an environmental impact statement is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality regulations found in Title 40, Code of Federal Regulations, Parts 1500-1508 and BLM Regulation: Public Land and Resources; Planning, Programming and Budgeting, Title 43, Part 1600. RMP/EIS preparation was also guided by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.

No separate rangeland program summary is being published in addition to this record of decision. Information in this decision document and the range management portion of the final RMP/EIS (including Appendices A,E,F,G,J,K) constitute the rangeland program summary. If significant changes to allotment information occurs, an update will be published and made available to interested parties.

II. SUMMARY OF THE PLAN

PROPOSED PLAN

This plan represents selection of portions of four alternatives which presents a favorable mix of resources management considering multiple use, planning questions and criteria, public input, and environmental consequences.

Minerals

Private industry is encouraged to explore and develop federal minerals to satisfy national, state, and local need. This policy provides for economically and environmentally sound exploration, extraction and reclamation practices. Public lands are open and available for mineral exploration and development unless otherwise withdrawn or administratively restricted. Mineral development may occur along with other resource uses. Programs to obtain and evaluate current energy and mineral data are encouraged.

(Coal)

Future development will come from current leases covering 39,391 acres (3.43 billion tons), those unleased areas determined acceptable for further consideration in the 1979 MFP Update and 1982 Amendment covering 91,700 acres (7.83 billion tons) and unleased areas determined acceptable for further consideration from new planning covering 869,600 acres (54.37 billion tons). The combined total is 1,000,691 acres (65.63 billion tons). Emergency leases will be issued to maintain production or avoid a bypass situation on a case-by-case basis. Exchanges will be considered for existing leases, by direction of legislation, and for leases located in alluvial valley floors. Other exchanges will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

(Saleable Minerals)

The resource area will meet the demand for these resources through sales or free use permits on a case-by-case basis, as in the past.

(Locatable Minerals)

Mineral exploration and development in the Resource Area will continue to be administered through existing surface and mineral management regulations (43 CFR 3800 and 43 CFR 3809).

(Oil and Gas Exploration and Development)

The 1980 Programmatic Environmental Assessment (EA) of the BLM oil and gas leasing program in the Miles City District is the policy document for oil and gas activity management in the Resource Area. Exploration and development on public lands will continue to be managed in accordance with this document.

Vegetation Utilization

	Short Term (AUMs)	Long Term (AUMs)
Livestock	208,083	233,387
Wildlife, watershed and other non- consumptive uses	624,249	700,161
TOTAL	832,332	933,548

(Range Management)

There will be 160,024 acres of selected public rangeland upgraded to good condition by using more intense grazing management and range improvements. Potential projects will include 30 wells, 300 reservoirs and pits, 20

pipelines (averaging five miles in length), 50 fences (averaging two miles in length), and 10 spring development. Up to 125,023 acres have potential for mechanical treatment and about 130 acres of noxious weeds may be controlled annually on a case-by-case basis. Biological control of weeds may be considered if proven effective. Prescribed burning may be used on about 20 acres annually. The 27 existing allotment management plans will be continued and up to 72 potential activity plans may be implemented on 215,905 acres of rangeland.

(Wildlife Habitat Management)

The management of wildlife habitat will continue at the current level. This consists of monitoring the condition of sites known to be of high value to wildlife and protecting valuable wildlife habitat in the development and implementation of activity plans. Wildlife facilities will be built at the current level. Average annual improvements consist of installing 20 bird ramps, 20 bird nest boxes and 10 goose nesting platforms, constructing one livestock exclosure and stocking two reservoirs with fish. About 40 acres of prairie dog towns may be controlled annually where prairie dogs are known to damage public and adjoining private rangelands.

Approximately 5,000 acres with potential to support woody riparian vegetation will receive special management consideration to promote substantial reproduction to assure that mature woody riparian areas approach good or better ecological condition. Approximately 21 of the proposed rangeland water sources identified as having wildlife values would be fenced to prevent livestock use except at water gaps.

(Watershed)

Soil and water, as well as air resources, will continue to be evaluated as a part of project level planning. Such evaluations consider the significance of a proposed project and the sensitivity of soil, water and air resources. Stipulations will be attached as needed to protect resources. Soils will be managed to maintain productivity and minimize erosion. Areas with accelerated erosion problems will be managed to improve watershed conditions. Water quality will be monitored and maintained or improved within state and federal standards.

Degradation of air quality in Class I (Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation) and Class II (the entire Resource Area) areas will be limited to acceptable levels as outlined in federal and state ambient air quality standards.

Lands Resources

(Land Transactions)

A total of 165,054 acres which meet Federal Land Policy and Management Act criteria are categorized with potential for disposal. In the long term, 123,542 acres may be considered for exchanges or jurisdictional transfers and 41,181 acres for sales. The 331 remaining acres with potential for community expansion may be disposed of on a case-by-case basis under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act.

(Trespass Abatement)

Existing unauthorized uses of public land will be resolved either through termination, authorization by lease or permit, exchange or sale.

New cases of unauthorized use generally will be terminated immediately. Temporary permits may be issued to provide short-term authorization, unless the situation warrants immediate cessation of the use and restoration of the land.

(Rights-of-Way)

Rights-of-way applications will continue to be approved on a case-by-case basis with appropriate stipulations. Applicants are encouraged to locate new facilities within existing rights-of-way.

(Leases, Permits, and Easements)

Legitimate uses of public land may be authorized on a case-by-case basis by permits, leases, and easements if they cannot be authorized by other laws and regulations.

Permits may be granted for uses that require no extensive improvements, construction, or surface disturbance.

Leases may be granted to authorize use of public lands for long-term developments.

Easements may be authorized to assure that the uses of public land, by the public, can be maintained and guaranteed. Easements are also sought to provide legal public access to isolated tracts of public land.

Management of Wilderness Study Areas

Zook Creek and Buffalo Creek WSAs are recommended as nonsuitable for wilderness designation. Future management would consider other resources.

Information dealing with wilderness will form the basis for a wilderness legislative EIS and suitability report on each WSA. These documents will be reviewed by the Director of the BLM and the Secretary of the Interior. A final proposal on Zook Creek and Buffalo Creek WSAs will then be submitted to the President and finally acted upon by Congress. Pending final wilderness determination, the WSAs will be managed through the BLM's Interim management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review, which is designed to protect all wilderness values. Depending on final determinations, the WSAs will be managed either as wilderness or for multiple use similar to other public land.

Cultural Resources

The objective of the BLM cultural resource program is management of cultural resources in a stewardship role for public benefit.

Actual use of public cultural resources by qualified institutions is authorized and monitored by BLM through a permit system. BLM will continue to investigate and prosecute unauthorized use or destruction of significant cultural properties.

Cultural resource management objectives are also accomplished, in part, through development of site or area specific activity plans which identify cultural resource use and protection objectives, and outline procedures for evaluating accomplishments.

Cultural resources will continue to be inventoried and evaluated to achieve the objective of protecting significant properties from impact by proposed Bureau initiated or authorized actions. This inventory and evaluation is routinely a part of project level planning and includes application of the National Register criteria to cultural properties and consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation per current regulations, policy, and memoranda of agreement.

As time and funds permit, the BLM will continue to conduct inventories under the Cultural Resource Program to find and document cultural properties which qualify for the National Register. These later surveys will be directed toward areas where prior data indicates a possible need for active resource management to protect important sites. The BLM may also acquire scientifically or historically valuable sites through land exchanges, when such a goal is determined to be in the public interest.

Paleontological Resources

Paleontological resources currently are protected by clearance or review action on a case-by-case basis. Avoidance or mitigation of specimens is occasionally called for when there are surface disturbances. Management plans will be developed for significant properties requiring protection or stabilization. Assistance to institutions doing research or collection of specimens will continue. Monitoring and recording of specimen locations will continue.

Recreation

Management direction will protect potential recreation values. Recreation facilities will continue to be maintained at a modest level. Access to more public land for future recreation potential will be sought.

The entire resource area is designated as open to off-road vehicle use. Restriction or closures to ORV use may be established if future problems are identified. (ORV use at Zook Creek and Buffalo Creek WSA's is restricted to existing trails and ways during the interim management period.)

Visual resources will continue to be evaluated as a part of activity and project planning. Evaluation considers the significance of a proposed project and the visual sensitivity of a proposed project and the visual sensitivity of the affected area. Stipulations are to be attached as appropriate to assure compatibility of projects with management objectives for visual resources.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

There are no ACECs identified in the Resource Area. If such areas are identified in the future and their resource values cannot be protected through other management techniques, ACEC designation may be made.

Fire Management

The BLM's current management objectives are to take aggressive action on all new fires either on or threatening BLM lands, with sufficient forces to contain the fire during the first burning period.

Suppression action for fires that escape containment during the first burning period is planned to minimize total resource losses, suppression costs, rehabilitation costs, and environmental damage. When multiple fires are experienced, suppression priority is given to fires threatening areas of highest value.

Prescribed burns and modified suppression are recognized as range management tools and can be prescribed in an activity plan.

Forestry

Forestry products such as firewood, posts, poles and timber are sold on an incidental basis. The forestry resource will continue to be managed at the present level, which is primarily for wildlife habitat, soils stabilization and watershed.

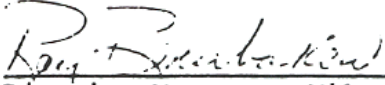
III. ISSUES AS THE BASIS FOR PLANNING, PLANNING QUESTIONS, AND CRITERIA

In accordance with Bureau policy, resource management plans are issue driven, requiring proposals for management of those resources which are raised as issues through input from the public, other federal or state agencies and officials within the Bureau of Land Management. During a scoping period, four issues were raised requiring thorough management consideration in the plan. These issues included future coal development, vegetation utilization for livestock, wildlife and watershed purposes, land exchanges and sales, and consideration of two wilderness study areas. These issues are considered in depth in the RMP/EIS, and the plan charts a change in direction from past management. Management of the remainder of resources does not change in direction. However, it is restated in the plan as management guidance common to all alternatives including the proposed plan. From the issues, planning questions were developed suggesting direction changes from past management in those resources. Criteria were then developed to identify the considerations and constraints that would be applied to the analysis throughout the planning process. These criteria were provided to the public before adoption.

IV. DECISION

I have reviewed the environmental consequences of the Powder River Resource Management Plan and the alternatives to the plan as discussed in the final Environmental Impact Statement. I have also reviewed the issues identified during the scoping period, planning questions, criteria and the public comments on the Draft RMP/EIS. The planning requirements described in 43 CFR Part 1600 have been complied with and are properly documented.

It is, therefore my decision to approve the Proposed Plan as presented in the Final RMP/EIS and summarized above.

 MAR 15 1965
District Manager, Miles City
Bureau of Land Management

V. REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Those resources discussed in the RMP/EIS as management guidance common to all alternatives, including the proposed plan, are currently being managed in a manner acceptable to the public, other federal and state agencies and the BLM. Therefore no change in management direction should be made unless it is warranted at some future time. If a change in management direction is warranted, an amendment or maintenance action to the RMP/EIS may be performed.

Considering the management of each resource identified as an issue, the following reasons are provided for selection of the proposed plan.

Coal

The coal portion from the proposed plan (Alternative B in the RMP/EIS) was preferred because it provided a wide selection of potential sites for coal leasing consideration while removing and protecting areas with substantial multiple use conflicts. This theme answers the question of which areas can be made available for further lease consideration using all criteria. Many of the environmental conflicts associated with surface mining could be mitigated by having a wide rather than narrow selection of potential sites for further lease consideration at this general planning point in the coal management program. BLM shares the concern stated in many public comments which would restrict new coal development, considering 1983 energy demands. This decision does not suggest nor prematurely restrict the possibility of new leasing for the life of the plan but allows future flexibility in meeting long term national energy needs.

Vegetation Utilization

The vegetation utilization proposal in the proposed plan (Alternative B in the RMP/EIS) was preferred, because it would provide for a balanced improvement of vegetation, wildlife habitat, and watershed conditions. The theme categorizes grazing allotments for improvement, maintenance, or custodial care, and does not adversely affect the rancher with proposed grazing reductions. Because about 70 percent of the rangeland is in good or better condition, this theme requires some minor changes from current management. This theme answers the planning questions about vegetation utilizations among livestock, wildlife, and watershed, allotment categorization, and utilization effects on the rancher. It makes full use of all criteria and is acceptable based on public input.

Lands

The lands portion in the proposed plan (Alternative D in the RMP/EIS) was preferred, because it best addresses the planning questions of potential repositioning of public lands, gaining public access, and seeking to acquire lands with high public values including those bordering large bodies of water. Through this theme improved land ownership patterns would be achieved using exchange as the preferred method of land transaction, with a de-emphasis on sales. Exchanges are preferred by the BLM and the public. Public land would largely remain under federal ownership, which was a common public concern. Transactions would only be made which would cause the fewest adverse and most beneficial impacts.

Wilderness

After assessing their wilderness qualities and potential, neither Zook Creek nor Buffalo Creek was recommended suitable for wilderness designation. Zook Creek possesses low wilderness values and Buffalo Creek possesses minimum wilderness values compared with other wilderness study areas within the District and general area. Wilderness manageability problems could arise from existing oil and gas leases at Zook Creek and at both areas from indirect conflicts from coal development.

The wilderness portion in the proposed plan (Alternative C in the RMP/EIS) was preferred because it allowed changes for future multiple use management. Both wilderness portions of Alternative A and Alternative C would propose no wilderness, but Alternative A would restrict resource management to the continuation of existing management.

The preferred theme addresses the planning question of wilderness suitability designation and considers all criteria. Public opinion, in general, was split on the wilderness issue.

THE PROPOSED PLAN

Based upon social, economic, physical and biological factors, the preferred alternative is the most environmentally preferable alternative. The Proposed Plan is the preferred alternative in the RMP/EIS. It was selected by the District Manager and recommended by a team composed of the Associate District Manager, Area Manager, Montana State Office Planning Coordinator, and Project Manager. The proposed plan was coordinated with the State of Montana including its resource agencies with jurisdiction in the resource area. Coordination was also made with other Federal natural resource agencies with jurisdiction in the area.

VI. DECISION PROCESS, THE ALTERNATIVES

Four alternatives to address the issues were formulated. The alternatives followed the general themes of no action, multiple use, resource production, and resource protection. The proposed plan incorporates varying themes for the individual issues as portrayed in the summary of the proposed plan. Following are summaries of the four alternatives:

ALTERNATIVE A (NO ACTION)

This alternative emphasizes a continuation of present management direction and would continue the present levels or systems of resource use and respond to the requirements of new regulations and changing policies.

Coal

Future development would come from current leases covering 39,391 acres (3.43 billion tons) and those unleased areas determined acceptable for further consideration in the 1979 MFP Update and 1982 Amendment covering 91,700 acres (7.83 billion tons). The combined total is 131,091 acres (11.26 billion tons). Emergency leases would be issued to maintain production or avoid a bypass situation on a case-by-case basis. Exchanges would only be considered for existing leases, by direction of legislation, or for leases located in alluvial valley floors.

Vegetation Utilization

	Short Term (AUMs)	Long Term (AUMs)
Livestock	208,083	208,083
Wildlife, watershed and other non-consumptive uses	624,249	624,249
TOTAL	832,332	832,332

Potential maintenance or replacement projects would include 30 wells, 225 reservoirs and pits, 30 pipelines (averaging five miles in length), 30 fences (averaging two miles in length), 60 springs developed and 4,500 acres of potential mechanical treatments. There would continue to be 27 allotment management plans on 148,232 acres. Woody riparian vegetation would receive special management on 5,000 acres. Wildlife facilities would be built at an average annual rate of 20 bird ramps, 20 bird nest boxes, 10 goose nesting platforms, one livestock enclosure and two reservoirs stocked with fish. An annual average of 130 acres of noxious weeds would be controlled on a case-by-case basis. Biological control of weeds would be considered if proved effective. Prescribed burning would be allowed on about 20 acres annually. Where prairie dogs are known to damage public and adjoining private rangelands, controls would be carried out on an average of 40 acres per year.

Land Adjustments

Adjustments to the land pattern would be made on a case-by-case basis. There would be an estimated 640 acres sold, 3,840 acres exchanged and 40 acres conveyed under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act based on long-term projections.

Wilderness

No suitability recommendation would be made for Zook Creek and Buffalo Creek WSAs. Present management of the two areas would continue.

ALTERNATIVE B (MULTIPLE USE)

This alternative emphasizes the management and production of resources with full consideration for multiple use values. Multiple use management would be directed toward providing a flow of renewable and nonrenewable resources from the public lands considering conflict with and mitigation measures for other resources.

Coal

Future development would come from current leases covering 39,391 acres (3.43 billion tons), those unleased areas determined acceptable for further consideration in the 1979 MFP Update and 1982 Amendment covering 91,700 acres (7.83 billion tons) and unleased areas determined acceptable for further consideration from new planning covering 869,600 acres (54.37 billion tons). The combined total is 1,000,691 acres (65.63 billion tons). Emergency leases would be issued to maintain production or avoid a bypass situation on a case-by-case basis. Exchanges would be considered for existing leases, by direction of legislation, for leases located in alluvial valley floors. Other exchanges would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Vegetation Utilization

	Short Term (AUMs)	Long Term (AUMs)
Livestock	208,083	233,387
Wildlife, watershed and other nonconsumptive uses	624,249	700,161
TOTAL	832,332	933,548

There would be 160,024 acres of selected public rangeland upgraded to good condition by using more intense grazing management and range improvements. Potential projects would include 30 wells, 300 reservoirs and pits, 20 pipelines (averaging five miles in length), 50 fences (averaging two miles in length), and 10 spring developments. Approximately 21 of the proposed water sources identified as having wildlife values would be fenced to prevent livestock use except at water gaps. Up to 125,023 acres have potential for mechanical treatments. The 27 existing allotment management plans would be continued and up to 72 potential activity plans would be implemented on 215,905 acres. Woody riparian vegetation would receive special management on 5,000 acres. Wildlife facilities would be built at an average annual rate of 20 bird ramps, 20 bird nest boxes, 10 goose nesting platforms, one livestock exclosure and two reservoirs stocked with fish. An annual average of 130 acres of noxious weeds would be controlled on a case-by-case basis. Biological control of weeds would be considered if proved effective. Prescribed burning would be allowed on about 20 acres annually. Where prairie dogs are known to damage public and adjoining private rangelands, controls would be carried out on an average of 40 acres per year.

Land Adjustments

A total of 165,054 acres would be categorized with potential for disposal. In the long term, 82,362 acres would be considered for sales and 82,361 acres for exchanges or jurisdictional transfers. The 331 remaining acres with potential for community expansion would be disposed of on a case-by-case basis under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act.

Wilderness

Zook Creek WSA would be recommended as suitable for wilderness and Buffalo Creek WSA would be recommended as unsuitable for wilderness. Zook Creek would be managed as wilderness but some current commitments would have to be honored. Future management of Buffalo Creek would consider other resources.

ALTERNATIVE C (RESOURCE PRODUCTION)

This alternative emphasizes a dominant singular resource use instead of the full spectrum of multiple uses. This management would be directed towards providing a significant increase in the use of a few resources with a corresponding reduction in the multiple use balance.

Coal

Further development would come from current leases covering 39,391 acres (3.43 billion tons), those unleased areas determined acceptable for further consideration in the 1979 MFP Update and 1982 Amendment covering 91,700 acres (7.83 billion tons) and unleased areas determined acceptable for further

consideration from new planning covering 963,900 acres (59.04 billion tons). The combined total is 1,094,991 acres (70.30 billion tons). Emergency leases would be issued to maintain production or avoid a bypass situation on a case-by-case basis. Exchanges would be considered for existing leases, by direction of legislation, for leases located in alluvial valley floors, and on a case-by-case basis.

Vegetation Utilization

	Short Term (AUMs)	Long Term (AUMs)
Livestock	208,083	319,269
Wildlife, watershed and other nonconsumptive uses	624,249	957,798
TOTAL	832,332	1,277,067

There would be 876,614 acres of selected public rangeland upgraded to excellent condition by using more intensive grazing management and range improvements. Potential projects would include 75 wells, 700 reservoirs and pits, 60 pipelines (averaging five miles in length), 150 fences (averaging two miles in length), and 50 springs developed. Approximately 49 of the proposed water sources identified as having wildlife value would be fenced to prevent livestock use except at water gaps. Up to 518,549 acres have the potential for mechanical treatment. The 27 AMPs would be continue with up to 246 potential activity plans implemented on 781,388 acres. Woody riparian vegetation would receive special management on 5,000 acres. Wildlife facilities would be built at an average annual rate of 20 bird ramps, 20 bird nest boxes, 10 goose nesting platforms, one livestock exclosure and two reservoirs stocked with fish. An annual average of 130 acres of noxious weeds would be controlled on a case-by-case basis. Biological control of weeds would be considered if proven effective. Prescribed burning would be allowed on 20 acres annually. Where prairie dogs are known to damage public and adjoining private rangelands, controls could be carried out on an average of 40 acres per year.

Land Adjustments

A total of 165,054 acres would be categorized with potential for disposal. In the long term, 123,542 acres would be considered for sales and 41,181 acres for exchanges for jurisdictional transfers. The 331 remaining acres having potential for community expansion would be disposed of on a case-by-case basis under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act.

Wilderness

Zook Creek and Buffalo Creek WSAs would be recommended as nonsuitable for wilderness designation. Future management would consider other resources.

ALTERNATIVE D (RESOURCE PROTECTION)

This alternative emphasizes a reduction in the use of resources and stresses the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

Coal

Future development would be restricted to current leases covering 39,391 acres (3.43 billion tons). Emergency leases would be issued to maintain production or avoid a bypass situation on a case-by-case basis. Exchanges would only be considered for existing leases, by direction of legislation, or for leases located in alluvial valley floors.

Vegetation Utilization

	Short Term (AUMs)	Long Term (AUMs)
Livestock	177,491	232,608
Wildlife, watershed and other nonconsumptive uses	654,841	701,727
TOTAL	832,332	934,335

There would be 314,469 acres of selected public rangeland upgraded to good condition by using more intensive grazing management and range improvements. Potential projects would include 30 wells, 300 reservoirs and pits, 20 pipelines (averaging five miles in length), 50 fences (averaging two miles in length), and 10 springs developed. There would be 21 water sources identified as having wildlife values and fenced. Up to 125,023 acres have potential for mechanical treatment. The 27 existing Allotment Management Plans would be continued with up to 72 potential activity plans implemented on 215,905 acres. Woody riparian vegetation would receive special management on 5,000 acres. Wildlife facilities would be built at an average annual rate of 20 bird ramps, 20 bird nests boxes, 10 goose nesting platforms, one livestock enclosure and two reservoirs stocked with fish. An annual average of 130 acres of noxious weeds would be controlled on a case-by-case basis. Biological control of weeds would be considered if proven effective. Prescribed burning would be allowed on 20 acres annually. Where prairie dogs are known to damage public and adjoining rangelands, controls would be carried out on an average of 40 acres per year.

Land Adjustments

A total of 165,054 acres would be categorized with potential for disposal. In the long term, 123,542 acres would be considered for exchanges for jurisdictional transfers and 41,181 acres for sales. The 331 remaining acres with potential for community expansion would be disposed of on a case-by-case basis under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act.

Wilderness

Zook Creek and Buffalo Creek WSAs would be recommended as suitable for wilderness designation. Both areas would be managed as wilderness but some current commitments would have to be honored.

VII Public Participation

Public participation and consultation during the preparation of the draft RMP/EIS began in 1980 with public scoping meetings held in Miles City, Hysham, Birney, Broadus, Ekalaka and Sheridan, Wyoming, . There was also an interagency coordination meeting held in Miles City. Coordination and

consultation meetings were also held with the Northern Cheyenne and Crow Indian tribes. In all, three informational and input gathering brochures were mailed while the RMP was in development.

Area newspapers and the Federal Register were also used as means to keep the public informed of the RMP development. One step in the process was consultation by letter with all of the approximately 450 surface owners over areas of federal coal with development potential in the Resource Area.

Public participation included requests for public input in the formulation of issues, criteria, initial alternatives and adoption of preferred alternatives. Mailings included addresses of those known to have been interested in Powder River Resource Area planning previously as well as a mass mailing to over 4,000 mail box holders in the Resource Area.

The draft RMP was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency on February 24, 1984. The notice of availability and a public hearing announcement were published on February 16, 1984 in the Federal Register. This notice announced a 90 day comment period from March 9, 1984 through June 7, 1984.

Over 2,000 copies of the draft were mailed to Federal, state and local governments, private groups and organizations and individuals for review and comment. News releases provided information on how to obtain copies of the draft. Formal public hearings were held during 1984 in Ekalaka, April 10; Broadus, April 11; Miles City, April 12; Sheridan, April 17; and Colstrip, April 18. A BLM official presided over each hearing and two BLM representatives served on the panel. A court reporter recorded the hearings verbatim.

An Interagency Agency meeting was held March 29, 1984 to coordinate and consult with representatives from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Department of State Lands, and the U.S. Soil Conservation Service. Also in attendance were representatives from the National Wildlife Federation.

Formal consultation with the Governor of Montana was accomplished following the public comment period. After a review of the public comments and the Draft RMP/EIS, the Governor provided comments from the State of Montana.

A total of 33 individuals, private organizations and federal and state agencies submitted comments on the recommendations and analysis contained in the Powder River Draft RMP/EIS. The comments were used in the preparation of the Final RMP/EIS. Over 2,000 copies of the final were mailed to federal, state, and local Governments, private groups and organizations and individuals.

The final RMP/EIS was filed with EPA and the Notice of Availability and Protest period were published in the Federal Register December 14, 1984. The protest period ended January 15, 1985.

VIII. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The proposed plan deals with coal development in a general nature. Before any actual coal development can occur, a number of further actions must take place. Areas cleared for further consideration pending further study must first be fully cleared. Prior to any eventual mining a winnowing process narrows down acceptable areas through a series of steps, namely: industry

expressions of leasing interest, tract delineation, site specific analysis/tract profile, tract ranking, selection and scheduling by the Regional Coal Team, a regional coal leasing EIS, and a tract sale. After a federal tract is leased, The State of Montana requires a mine plan EIS be written for each proposed mine.

If mining occurs, companies are required to comply with existing state and federal regulations governing mining and reclamation. These include: Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement regulations (30 CFR 700-899), Environmental Protection Agency regulations (40 CFR 0-1399), Council of Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), the Department of the Interior's Coal Management Program regulations (43 CFR 23 and 3400) and regulations promulgated under the Montana Strip and Underground Mine Reclamation Act.

The other decisions outlined in the Powder River RMP will be implemented over a period of 15 years or more, depending on the availability of funding and manpower. The effects of implementation will be monitored and evaluated on a periodic basis over the life of the plan. The general purposes of this monitoring and evaluation will be:

- (1) To determine if an action is fulfilling the purpose and need for which it was designed, or if there is a need for modification or termination of an action.
- (2) To discover unanticipated and/or unpredictable effects.
- (3) To determine if mitigation measures are working as prescribed.
- (4) To ensure that decisions are being implemented as scheduled.
- (5) To provide continuing evaluation of consistency with state and local plans and programs.
- (6) To provide for continuing comparison of plan benefits versus costs, including social, economic, and environmental.
- (7) To protect wilderness values at wilderness study areas.

A specific monitoring plan will be written for the wildlife, watershed, and grazing management programs. This plan will provide a framework of study methods that will provide the information needed to issue and implement specific management decisions which affect watershed, wildlife, and range. Monitoring efforts will focus on allotments in the improve category. For the range program, methodologies are available for monitoring vegetative trend, forage utilization, actual use (livestock numbers and periods of grazing), and climate. The data collected from these studies will be used to evaluate current stocking rates, to schedule pasture moves by livestock, to determine levels of forage competition, to detect changes in plant communities, and to identify patterns of forage use. Some of the methodologies that could be used include: Daubenmire canopy transects, Lommason utilization transects, key forage plant utilization estimates, aerial and ground reconnaissance of animal numbers and grazing patterns, actual use questionnaires, ecological site surveys, low altitude aerial photography transects, and ecological site surveys based on range sites, soils series and range condition ratings.

Priorities for monitoring grazing allotments will be established in a monitoring plan. The methodology and intensity of study that is chosen for a particular allotment will be determined by the nature and severity of the resource conflicts that are present in that allotment.

For the wildlife program, monitoring will be directed at the biotic resource components using both temporary and permanent studies. The findings from these studies can be used to monitor responses in habitat condition and trend; monitor forage availability, composition, and vigor; monitor changes in cover and habitat effectiveness; and monitor habitat management objectives.

Some of the methodologies that are available include; Daubenmire canopy coverage transect, woody riparian surveys and photo plots, range site condition ratings, height/weight grazed plant method, fish species composition and population surveys, and nongame bird and small mammal plots.

Monitoring for the watershed program will mainly consider soil productivity, moisture, erosion, although trends in streambank stability and water quality will be addressed during mining and forestry activities. Some of the methodologies that can be used are the point frame method, the sediment trap method, the particle transport method, and channel geometry.

Specific monitoring actions for other programs will be developed if the need arises.

The data collected from the monitoring and evaluation process will be analyzed and fed back into the decision making process. This will provide information regarding the effects of the land use decisions, the adequacy of mitigation methods. If monitoring indicates that significant unexpected adverse impacts are occurring or that mitigating measures are not working as predicted, it may be necessary to amend or revise the RMP. Conversely, if implementation and mitigating efforts are highly successful, monitoring and evaluation efforts may be reduced.